

THE OLYMPIC GAMES AND THE SUPPORTERS OF THE CATALAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE



Ever since the days of Baron de Coubertin, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has stood out in the Olympic and Political landscapes. In its urge to serve the ideal of fraternity between peoples, the Olympic movement has, since the famous "All nations, all games" of Pierro de Coubertin, always recognized Olympic committees whose jurisdiction doesn't correspond to that of the political state to which they belong. The adoption and preservation of these criteria on the part of the Olympic movement is a result of the private nature (international, but private) of the international sports federations and of the IOC itself, and the application of these strictly sporting, rather than political criteria has gradually strengthened the freedom of action and the sovereignty of the Olympic organizations, along with their independence as regards world political forces.

All this, sensibly led and without any essential changes, has contributed to the continuity of the modern Olympic Games, which will soon be a hundred years old.

These rules and this sovereignty of the Olympic movement made it possible for various Catalan sports federations to be members of international federations at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and in some cases, to be founder members. As regards the movement for the creation of the

Catalan Olympic Committee, this was started in 1913 by the pioneer of sports journalism, Josep Elias i Juncosa. After 1916 the IOC allowed a representative of the Athletics Federation of Catalonia to be present at its meetings. In January 1921 the presidents of the main Catalan sports federations and organizations set up the Catalan Olympic Committee, under the

chairmanship of Sr. Josep Garcia Alsina.

In January 1922 that original organization approved a statute that responded to the aims and objectives of the Olympic committees, and took the name of Sports Confederation of Catalonia (CEC). Sr. Joan Ventosa i Calvell was elected president.

That same year, 1922, the IOC, meeting in Paris, decided to award the Olympic Cup to the Sports Confederation of Catalonia for its work of promoting the Olympics in this country.

Baron de Coubertin wrote that he hoped the IOC meeting in 1924 would recognise the CEC at the same time as the Irish Olympic Council, when Ireland was under the dominion of the British crown. It's important to remember that today, following the creation of the Irish Republic, many sports federations regulate sport throughout the whole of Ireland, including Northern Ireland (the sporting boundaries aren't the same as the political boundaries).

We shall never know if the IOC would have



recognized the CEC as the Catalan committee in 1924. The *coup d'état* by General Primo de Rivera in 1923 and the subsequent dictatorship put a stop to activities in the name of Catalonia and, as a result, to the possibility of raising the issue before the IOC. The years have passed, regimes and dictatorships have succeeded one another, Spain is once more a constitutional kingdom that includes Catalonia, which is recognized as a "nationality".

The autonomous government and the Catalan Parliament have been restored, and the State Organic Law on the Statute of Autonomy revived in 1978 gives them exclusive power in questions of sport.

The Catalan sports federations, which after 1923 had become mere delegations of the Spanish federations, have been reconstituted and have recovered their juridical identity and the power to act. This process, which culminated in 1986, made it possible to think about the restoration of the Olympic Committee of Catalonia, not for the 1988 Games, but certainly as from 1992, thus adding to the enjoyment and brilliance of the Olympic Games of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia. The initiative arose amongst Catalan sports fans, who in January 1987 set up the Association for the Catalan Olympic Delegation (ADOC). The legal, historical and promotional work has roused the awareness of the sporting, cultural and civic sectors of Catalonia.

Local authorities, institutions, public figures and the Catalan Parliament have given their support to the ADOC's proposal that Catalan athletes should be able to take part in the Olympic Games under the name and the flag of Catalonia. To this end, the Catalan Olympic Committee (COC) was set up in 1989, with the presence of Sr. Miquel Arbós i Abadal, president of the Catalan Cycling Federation. By April 1990 there were eleven Catalan federations in the COC, under the chairmanship of Sr. Josep Miró i Ardèvol.

A public opinion poll carried out by Catalan Television (TV3) in 1989 revealed the fact that 80% of the inhabitants of Catalonia wanted a Catalan Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games of 1992.

More and more Catalans are joining the ADOC, which now has 4,100 members, and a number of Catalan federations have decided to join the COC. But the immediate job is the incorporation of the COC federations in their respective international federations, without having to leave the Spanish federations, and the recognition of the COC itself on the part of the IOC, on the basis of its independence and freedom of choice as mentioned earlier.

Catalans and friends of Catalonia all over the world are starting to collaborate in this work and in the strengthening of the ADOC. To them, more than anyone, are these lines addressed. □

ALBERT BERTRANA PRESIDENT OF ADOC AND GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COC